

How PCS Staff Can Support A Successful Open Nominations Process: Tips and Best Practices:¹

Legislation

The Ryan White legislation requires that “Nominations for membership on the council shall be identified through an open process and candidates shall be selected based on locally delineated and publicized criteria.” [Section 2602(b)(1)]

Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program Part A Manual²

The *Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWHAP) Part A Manual* says that:

“An open nominations process is necessary to obtain a planning council whose membership meets both legislative requirements and the practical needs of the Ryan White Part A program. This requirement is to ensure broad community representation on the planning council, membership that reflects the epidemic of HIV/AIDS in the eligible metropolitan area (EMA) or transitional grant area (TGA), and a diverse range of perspectives during planning council deliberations.” [p 116]

The *RWHAP Part A Manual* also indicates that the open nominations process must meet specified minimum standards, including the following:

- “Be described and announced before the nominations process begins”
- “Specify clear criteria on the planning council composition being sought”
- “Be publicized”
- Allow people to “apply for membership or be nominated by others”
- Inform applicants about PC member roles and responsibilities, time commitments, and Conflict of Interest (COI) policies
- Use a “standardized, plain-language application form” [p 118]

The CEO is expected “to approve and/or appoint as planning council members only individuals who have gone through the open nominations process.” [p 118]

No specific requirements are stated for planning bodies that are not planning councils. However, DMHAP recommends that they look as much like PCs as possible in terms of both membership representation and reflectiveness of the characteristics of the local epidemic.

Tips and Best Practices

Here are some best practices for an efficient and successful open nominations process. As PCS staff, you should be able to help the PC/B meet all federal open nominations requirements, and help members develop and refine processes to reflect best practices and meet local needs.

1. **Use an annual nominations cycle, and be sure you know what slots your PC/B will need to fill each cycle**, in terms of legislatively required “slots” and member characteristics to ensure reflectiveness. Keep an updated listing of members that indicates for each individual member:

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² For more information, see *RWHAP Part A Manual*, Section XI: Planning and Planning Bodies, Chapter 5: Planning Council Nominations, pp 116-121.

- Current term of service, and whether the member will be required to cycle off the PC/B as of a specific date due to term limits
 - Slot currently filled by that member
 - Other membership slots this member is qualified to fill – for example, a person might represent a housing program but also be qualified to serve as a non-elected community leader, although HRSA/HAB in most cases allows a member to fill only one slot)
 - Characteristics related to reflectiveness: at least race/ethnicity, gender/gender identification, and age at diagnosis
 - HIV status for individuals who are publicly disclosed as HIV positive (if some unaligned consumer members are not publicly disclosed, maintain this information in a secure location)
 - Other factors important to your PC/B, such as where in the EMA or TGA the member lives (many PC/Bs seek representation from different neighborhoods or counties within the jurisdiction)
2. **Ensure concentrated, targeted outreach on an annual cycle, using diverse tools.** Allow time for various types of outreach, using social media, specialized community media, and direct contacts with service providers, universities, and other entities. Be prepared to work with appropriate PC/B members to reach out to key target communities by making presentations, sending materials, and talking to community leaders. Ask your PLWH Committee to assist with outreach, especially to consumers and other PLWH.
 3. **Time your nominations process based on your jurisdiction’s annual appointment/reappointment date.** Work with the PC/B, especially the Membership Committee, to schedule the process so that all phases – from identifying slots to be filled through CEO review and appointments – will be completed before current member terms end.
 4. **Use an easy-to-complete plain language application form,** offering applicants the opportunity to apply online or by hand and mail or bring it to the Planning Council Support (PCS) office. Allow use of a resume, but don’t assume everyone has a resume. Use several open-ended questions to allow applicants to talk about their experience and background, including knowledge about HIV/AIDS and the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWHAP). Be sure to ask about special interests and skills of interest to your PC/B.
 5. **Be clear about requirements and expectations for HIV-positive members and unaligned consumers.** Include this information in your application package and in your outreach. Define characteristics of an “unaligned consumer,” and indicate what level of public disclosure of HIV status is required. For example, HRSA/HAB requires that the PC/B include at least two consumers who publicly identify themselves as PLWH,³ but local requirements beyond this minimum need to be stated. Some jurisdictions require all unaligned consumer members to be publicly disclosed. Others require full disclosure within the PC/B but not in minutes or other public documents. Still others allow status to be known only by the PCS manager and PC/B leadership or only by the Membership Committee.
 6. **If your jurisdiction and PLWH community include a substantial number of people who speak languages other than English at home, make application and descriptive materials available in those languages** – and advertise in media and community sources serving

³ See *RWHAP Part A Manual*, Section X. Planning Council Operations, Chapter 6. PLWHA/Consumer Participation, p 124.

those communities. Be clear in the application whether you offer interpretation during meetings, and in what languages (e.g., Spanish, American Sign Language, Creole).

7. **Assist the PC/B Membership Committee with initial screening, based on its guidance.** Usually this means determining which slots an applicant is eligible to fill, whether s/he is an unaligned consumer, and acknowledging receipt of the application, after determining whether any requested information is missing. For example, some PC/Bs require an applicant who wants to represent a specific type of agency (e.g., substance abuse or mental health provider, housing provider, Part C or D recipient) to provide a letter of support from the Executive Director promising release time or access to information needed to fully represent this entity. In some jurisdictions, only the PCS staff knows the full name of applicants, which is provided only on the cover sheet. Often, PCS staff will work with members of the Committee to group applicants based on open slots, identify slots where no applications have been reviewed, and do further outreach.
8. **Support the application review process.** If needed, help the Committee develop a review form used for all complete applications that fit at least one membership slot, and enables committee members to screen applicants using a consistent process. For example, some jurisdictions establishes three-person task forces, and each group reviews and scores assigned applications. If names are known, Committee members do not review applications from people they know. A 3- to 5-point scale is often used to rate responses to each question or section of the application – from 5 or 3 for “fully meets criteria” to 1 for “does not meet criteria.” An applicant may need an average (mean) score above the midpoint (e.g., 2 for a 3-point scale) to be considered qualified for membership. Screening may be based on the written materials, or applicants may be interviewed.
9. **Help ensure that members seeking reappointment complete applications and go through the open nominations process.** Reappointment should consider such factors as attendance at PC/B meetings and active participation on a committee. Some jurisdictions do not require current members to be interviewed, but do expect them to indicate what they have done to strengthen services to PLWH through their PC/B membership and what they commit to do if reappointed.
10. **Involve the entire PC/B in the open nominations process** – not only as the last step in reviewing nominees from the Membership Committee and approving their recommendation to the CEO, but also in recruiting potential candidates.
11. **Build a pool of qualified potential members throughout the year.** Jurisdictions do this in many ways, such as encouraging non-members to serve as members of some PC/B committees, providing training for potential members (one example is LEAP in Houston, described in the Resource section of this compendium), have a category of non-voting members who become members-in-training (as Atlanta does), and use the PLWH Committee or Consumer Caucus as a vehicle for leadership training.
12. **When vacancies occur during the year, nominate people for the remainder of the uncompleted term rather than providing a full term for the new member.** This maintains a cycle with a set proportion of members that have terms ending at the same time each year (e.g., one-third of members if you have three-year terms, one-half if you have two-year terms), and reduces the future number of new members who join the PC/B mid-year and need an orientation off-cycle.